China asks firms to stop using US, Israeli cybersecurity software

Washington allows Nvidia to send advanced AI chips to China with restrictions

BEIJING/SAN FRANCISCO: Chinese authorities have told domestic companies to stop using cybersecurity software made by roughly a dozen firms from the US and Israel due to national security concerns.

As trade and diplomatic tensions flare between China and the US and both sides vie for tech supremacy, Beijing has been keen to replace Western-made technology with domestic alternatives.

The US companies whose cybersecurity software has been banned include Broadcom-owned VMware, Palo Alto Networks and Fortinet, while the Israeli companies include Check Point Software Technologies, the sources said.

Shares of Broadcom and Palo Alto Networks were down more than 1pc in premarket trading, while those of Fortinet fell nearly 3pc.

Chinese authorities expressed concern that the software could collect and transmit confidential information abroad, the sources said. They declined to be named due to the sensitivity of the situation.

While the West and China have clashed over China's efforts to build up its semiconductor and artificial intelligence sectors, Chinese analysts have said Beijing has become increasingly concerned that any Western equipment could be hacked by foreign powers. It has therefore sought to replace Western computer equipment and word processing software.

The country's largest cybersecurity providers include 360 Security Technology and Neusoft.

Nvidia to send advanced AI chips

The US Commerce Department on Tuesday opened the door for Nvidia to sell advanced artificial intelligence chips in China with restrictions, following through on a policy shift announced last month by President Donald Trump.

The change would permit Nvidia to sell its powerful H200 chip to Chinese buyers if certain conditions are met — including proof of "sufficient" US supply — while sales of its most advanced processors would still be blocked.

However, uncertainty has grown over how much demand there will be from Chinese companies, as Beijing has reportedly been encouraging tech companies to use homegrown chips.

Chinese officials have informed some firms they would only approve buying H200 chips under special circumstances, such as development labs or university research, news website *The Information* reported on Tuesday, citing people with knowledge of the situation.

The Information had previously reported that Chinese officials were calling on companies there to pause H200 purchases while they deliberated requiring them to buy a certain ratio of AI chips made by Nvidia rivals in China. In its official update on Tuesday, the US Commerce Department's Bureau of Industry and Security said it had changed the licensing review policy for H200 and similar chips from a presumption of denial to handling applications case-by-case.

Trump announced in December an agreement with Chinese President Xi Jinping to allow Nvidia to export its H200 chips to China, with the US government getting a 25-pc cut of sales. —Agencies

WRECKAGE at the site after the derailment.—Reuters

32 killed after crane falls on train in Thailand

SIKHIO: A train derailed in northeastern Thailand on Wednesday after a construction crane fell on two of its carriages, killing at least 32 people and injuring 66, the regional governor said.

The accident occurred in the Sikhio district of Nakhon Ratchasima province, 230km northeast of Bangkok, on a train from the capital bound for Ubon Ratchathani province.

Transport Minister Phiphat Ratchakitprakarn said in a statement there were 195 people aboard the train, adding that he had ordered a thorough investigation. The crane was working on a high-speed rail project when it collapsed and hit the passing train, causing it to derail and briefly catch fire.

Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul told the State Railway of Thailand to provide good compensation for families of the dead, adding in comments to reporters after being briefed at the scene: "We need to investigate... and take legal action." The Italian-Thai Development Public Company Limited , which was contracted to build the rail segment, expressed regret for the accident and said it would provide compensation and relief to families of the casualties.

In March last year, a 30-storey building under construction in Bangkok by a joint venture including ITD collapsed, killing 89 people, after an 8.8-magnitude earthquake struck neighbouring Myanmar.

ITD President Premchai Karnasuta was indicted in August along with 22 others on allegations of negligence and breaching construction regulations. The executive and 14 others denied wrongdoing when they were first arrested in May.

Smoke billows from wreckage

Images shared by the ministry showed train carriages overturned next to shrubland and firefighters extinguishing a blaze as smoke billowed out. Earlier footage of the crash site showed rescue workers trying to extract casualties from one of the mangled carriages, with some badly injured passengers already being loaded into ambulances.

The elevated high-speed rail project, one of several under construction in Thailand, was being built above the existing rail line. Part of the collapsed crane is still propped up by the concrete stanchions built to support the new rail link, with debris dangling over the tracks below.

The construction is part of the Bangkok-Nakhon Ratchasima segment of the transnational high-speed rail project linking the Thai capital with the southwest Chinese city of Kunming.

Recovery operations at the accident scene continued into Wednesday evening with Anutin saying the track needed to be cleared by the end of the week. He noted that this was a major rail route and delays would hurt the regional economy.

High-speed link

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said the Beijing government attached great importance to the safety of projects and personnel in Thailand and was looking into the situation.

"At present, it seems that the relevant section was under construction by a Thai enterprise. The cause of the accident is still under investigation." The cross-country high-speed rail project will connect to China through Laos. The government said last year that more than a third of construction had been completed in the segment connecting Bangkok to Nakhon Ratchasima, with the whole line to Nong Khai at the border with Laos ready by 2030.—Reuters

FBI searches WP journalist's home in security probe

WASHINGTON: Agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation searched a Washington Post reporter's home on Wednesday as part of an investigation into sharing secret government information, in a move that advocates said threatened press freedom.

The reporter, Hannah Natanson, has covered President Donald Trump's campaign to fire hundreds of thousands of federal workers and shift remaining workers to implementing his agenda.

Attorney General Pam Bondi said federal agents had executed the search at the request of the Defence Department. The Justice Department last year reversed a policy that had barred prosecutors from seizing records from reporters in most circumstances.

Natanson wrote a story last month about her personal experience covering the effort titled "I am *The Post's* 'federal government whisperer'. It's been brutal." In it, Natanson related the relentless pace of calls and messages she received from former and current federal employees frustrated by the changes.

The newspaper reported that Natanson was present for the search of her Virginia home. It reported that the search was linked to the case against Aurelio Perez-Lugones, a technology specialist for a US government contractor who was charged last week with unlawful retention of national defence information.

Prosecutors alleged that Perez-Lugones took screenshots of classified intelligence reports and printed those documents, according to a criminal complaint.

Investigators also found documents marked "secret" in a lunchbox in Perez-Lugones's car and in his basement, according to an FBI affidavit. "The Trump administration will not tolerate illegal leaks of classified information that, when reported, pose a grave risk to our Nations national security," Bondi said on X.

Advocates of press freedom said the search was a dramatic escalation in the administration's ongoing attacks on news media.

"Searches of newsrooms and journalists are hallmarks of illiberal regimes, and we must ensure that these practices are not normalised here," said Jameel Jaffer, executive director of the Knight First Amendment Institute.—Reuters

Berlin says transatlantic ties 'disintegrating'

BERLIN: Germany's vice chancellor warned on Wednesday that Europe's ties with the United States were "disintegrating" as they endure a "historic period of upheaval" under President Donald Trump's administration.

"The transatlantic alliance is undergoing a much more profound upheaval than we may have been willing to admit until now," Lars Klingbeil, also Germany's finance minister, said in a speech in Berlin.

"The transatlantic relationship as we have known it is currently disintegrating." Klingbeil said he had become even more convinced of this in recent days. He paid a visit to Washington this week along with Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul.

The vice chancellor is from the centre-left SPD party that governs in coalition with the conservative bloc led by Chancellor Friedrich Merz, and his language is stronger than any used by Merz in recent times.—AFP

What happens when fire ignites in space? 'A ball of flame'

PARIS: When fire breaks out in the low-gravity, high-stakes conditions inside spacecraft or space stations, it behaves very differently than back here on Earth.

So, as humans aim to set foot on Mars in the coming decades, researchers are seeking to learn how flames spark and spread in space — and how best to stamp them out.

The deadly threat fire poses in space goes all the way back to the first mission of Nasa's Apollo programme, which would go on to put the first humans on the Moon.

Just days before the Apollo 1 mission was scheduled to launch in January 1967, its three crew members were killed by a fire that broke out in the spacecraft's cabin during a training exercise on the ground.

"At that time, the capsules were filled with 100 percent pure oxygen at low pressure, instead of atmospheric pressure, so the astronauts could breathe," explained Serge Bourbigot, a researcher at France's Centrale Lille institute. "However the more oxygen you have, the more it burns," he said.

Since the Apollo 1 disaster, the oxygen levels in spacecraft carrying astronauts have been set to 21 per cent — the same amount as here on Earth. But fire still acts differently in these cramped conditions hurtling through the vastness of space.

A spherical flame

When you light a candle on Earth, the heat rises because hot air is less dense than cold air. However if you lit that candle inside a spacecraft or a station orbiting our planet, the heat would stay put because of the lack of gravity.

So instead of seeing a feather-shaped plume rise from the candle's wick, "you get a ball of flame," Bourbigot said. "This ball will create and radiate heat, sending heat into the local environment — the fire will spread that way," expanding in every direction, he added.

To find out more, Bourbigot and three other scientists have been awarded a grant from the European Research Council. Their work has proved particularly timely because Nasa recently recommended that oxygen levels be increased to 35pc in new spacecraft and space stations, mainly to cut costs.

"With 35pc oxygen, less pressure is needed inside the spacecraft, so the structure can be lighter," Bourbigot explained. Heavier spacecraft require bigger rockets to launch them into space, making them more expensive. But when oxygen levels rise, so does the risk of fire. So the grantees are investigating different ways to track and stamp out any space blazes in the future.

Lighting a fire on a rocket

Guillaume Legros of France's Sorbonne University is trying to use acoustic waves to smother the flames. Tests have already been carried out on parabolic flights, which simulate the weightless conditions of space for 22 seconds.

Bourbigot is meanwhile looking into flame retardants. While these chemicals work well here on Earth, low gravity again throws up new hurdles. Because smoke does not rise in the same way, it is more dense and "poses an opacity problem", Bourbigot said.

Florian Meyer from Germany's University of Bremen is developing sensors to closely monitor temperatures and track how fires would spread in space. And fire safety researcher Bart Merci from Belgium's Ghent University is planning to digitally simulate how flames behave in low gravity.

To test their theories, a rocket is planned to launch within the next four years that will provide six minutes of microgravity to investigate how fire behaves in these conditions.

European aerospace manufacturer Airbus will build the rocket, which is set to launch from northern Sweden. For their research, which is grouped under the Firespace programme, the four scientists have received 14 million euros ($16 million) — enough to fund their work for the next six years.—AFP

NEWSMAKERS

TREIGNY (France): A technician captures the sounds of manual labour performed by the builders of a castle, who are using 13th-century techniques and tools to construct a fortified castle. Mylene Pardoen, a "sound archaeologist", is aiming to recreate the soundtrack of the Middle Ages. This former military helicopter mechanic has retrained as a musicologist. Combining her passion for history with expertise in sound, she has invented her own profession, unique in the world: sound archaeologist.—AFP

BERLIN: Greenpeace activists demonstrate for protection of the oceans in front of the Brandenburg Gate, days before the Global Ocean Treaty enters into force. The treaty is "the first legally binding agreement focused on conserving marine life".—AFP

CANADA's Prime Minister Mark Carney receives flowers upon his arrival at Beijing Airport.—Reuters

Canada's PM arrives in China for state visit

BEIJING: Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney arrived in Beijing on Wednesday for a state visit, Chinese state broadcaster CCTV said.

Carney, who is expected to meet President Xi Jinping for talks on Friday, is the first Canadian leader to visit China in eight years. The two leaders met on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in South Korea in October, which Carney described as a "turning point" in the two nations' strained relationship.

Carney's predecessor Justin Trudeau visited China in December 2017. But ties withered in 2018 after the arrest of a senior executive from Chinese tech giant Huawei on a US warrant in Vancouver and China's retaliatory detention of two Canadians on espionage charges.

China has also been accused of interfering in Canadian elections in recent years. Aside from Xi, Carney will meet with Premier Li Qiang and business leaders for trade negotiations.

Beijing said this week it "attaches high importance" to the visit.China bought fewer goods from Canada last year for the first time since 2020, according to Chinese data released on the same day as the Canadian prime minister starts his China visit, in a stark reminder of the economic leverage Beijing has over Ottawa.

Chinese imports from Canada tumbled 10.4pc in 2025 to $41.7 billion from an all-time high a year earlier, a scheduled monthly statistics release by China's customs authority showed on Wednesday. The last time inbound shipments fell was in 2020, when the pandemic knocked down imports by a staggering 22.3pc.—AFP

URNASCH (Switzerland): A costumed member of the yodel group takes part in traditional Saint Sylvester's Day festivities. The festival, a traditional custom from the Swiss canton of Appenzell, features colourfully dressed figures organised in groups called 'Schuppel'. They symbolically chase away the old year and welcome the new one by travelling from farmstead to farmstead, singing yodels and greeting farmers.—AFP

AMRITSAR: A Sikh volunteer cleans the holy lake on the occasion of a festival amid dense fog at the Golden Temple.—AFP